A Peachy Voice: The Analysis of The Subaltern in Samad Behrangi's *One Peach and 1000 Peaches*

ABSTRACT

Everything we see depends on our perspective. If you ask two people to look at a window, one might see a small, dirty room with far too many people living in it; while the other might see a warm and happy family whom are enjoying their time together. To an outsider, it might seem they are describing two different rooms, for we see what we want to see. The same thing can be said for Samad Behrangi's stories; one might simply see a children's folklore, while someone like me might see a post colonial story of the unvoiced finding their voice. To most people, Samad Behrangi is just a teacher who tells a story while teaching something to children, to me Behrangi is the voice of the voiceless. I believe there is more to "One peach and 1000 peaches" story than meets the eye.

INTRODUCTION

The story of "One peach and 1000 peaches" is the story of a peach who didn't want to be eaten by the Lord's daughter, for she would never appreciate it; instead the peach was eaten by two poor peasant boys and planted by them. The boys used to steal fruit from the garden, but they decided they wanted a tree of their own, and by planting their own tree, they found a voice. But later on one of the boys was killed, and the tree was discovered by the gardener who wanted its fruit for the Lord; the story ends with the peach tree never giving a single peach to the gardener, knowing its end is near.

In the "Can the Subaltern Speak?" Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak introduces the subaltern, saying that subaltern is the social group who are socially, politically, and geographically outside of the hegemonic power structure of the colony and of the colonial homeland. The

Subaltern is left out of the only way they can have a voice and a political representation. In one of her interviews Spivak says that "Subaltern is not just a classy word for “oppressed”, for [the] Other, for somebody who’s not getting a piece of the pie. . . . In post-colonial terms, everything that has limited or no access to the cultural imperialism is subaltern — a space of difference." (Kock) Some also believe that "Spivak questions the notion of the colonial (and Western) “subject” and provides an example of the limits of the ability of Western discourse, even postcolonial discourse, to interact with disparate cultures." (Maggio 419) This is the idea I will try to use in order to try and understand Behrangi's story a little more.

DISCUSSION

The Garden in the story was built near a very poor village, and while the villagers were suffering from lack of water, the garden was filled with different kinds of trees and lavished with water. The Lord had sold many lands to the villagers, but the lands had no water and the people were hardly able to plant anything. The only land with water and decent ground was the land the Garden was built on and it belonged to the Lord himself.

> Some years back the Lord had divided all the village lands and had sold them to the villagers, but he had kept the Garden for himself. Of course, the village's lands were neither flat nor had any trees in them. They didn't have water either. The village only had one flat land, and that was the Lord's Garden, the rest of the lands were uneven and on top of the valley which the villagers had bought form the Lord and dry land farmed Barley and wheat. (بهرنگی 241)

The picture the reader is given is of a Lord who usurps his people and tricks them in to thinking that they can become something more than poor villagers and make their lives

better. But in reality the opposite happens. The villagers have the illusion of success and prosperity in front of them, the Lord's garden, and they think if they work a bit harder and endure a bit more they will make it and become just like their Lord. This is vividly portrayed in the village's description, a poor village that smells like animal waste used for plantation. The villagers try their best to plant and harvest as much as they can, planting plants that do not need much water and doing everything in their power to make the ground rich, but they are never successful for hardly anything can grow in stony lands.

What the villagers fail to see is the fact that the Lord does not want them to succeed, for if they do they will no longer be under his control. The Lord pours a lot of money in his garden, as well as spending much more on importing fruit while his garden is blessed with an unimaginable amount of fruit. This is especially clear when we are given a description of the Mother Peach tree and how she was a crossbred between an Iranian tree and a foreign one to make her bear much more than an ordinary tree can; or how the Lord's daughter was gifted by fruit and flowers that were brought to her by an airplane from the Colonizing country. "The gardener says that the Lord brings his daughter fruit from other countries. He orders his men to bring his daughter oranges, bananas and grapes and even flowers with airplane. Of course he spends money like water for these things." (247 بهرنگی) The Lord did not need the garden's fruit, but he never let others have them, the same way he never let the villagers succeed and have a voice of their own.

This is what was happening to Iran at that time, how powerful countries gave Iranians the illusion of being equal and able to rise as they had, while Iran was nothing but another poppet in their hands. Iran was given foreign experts in different trades, but no Iranian was ever shown how they could work without a supervisor. The people had the illusion of reaching a

technology or product, but it was never they who had the knowledge or power. Iran was living under her colonizer's shadow without her knowledge.

The Village is the representation of Iran at that time; the Garden represents Iran's resources in control of the colonized government. The water being the money and life force needed for a land to survive was withheld from the Iranian farmers and was given to the Lord, the colonizer. Whatever valuable products that were made in Iran were exported to the colonizing country, including Oil that was the blood in Iran's veins. This natural resource was never shared or given to the people of the country, but taken away from the ones it belonged to, just like the water in the Garden. Something that could save lives was taken away and given to those who had the power, but no right to hold it.

The Gardener represents the Iranian government who worked for the Colonizing country. The Gardener guards the garden with a gun and never lets any of the villagers into the garden, picking the fruits and giving them to the Lord. The Lord himself is never seen in the story, just as the Colonizer is never seen by the colonized. The Gardener is just like any other peasant, with the difference that he thinks he is better for he works for the Lord, while he too is under the illusion of having a voice and power. What he fails to see is how he is being controlled by the colonizer's strings, letting them steal what belongs to him and his fellow countrymen for the promise of a voice he is never going to have.

The boys, Poolad and Saheb-Ali are the marginal characters who want to have a voice of their own. They are the only ones who are never scared of the Gardener's gun, and are brave enough to go to the Garden and steal the fruit that supposedly belongs to the Lord. "I heard a voice. Two people climbed the garden's wall, jumped in and ran towards me. They were Saheb-Ali and Poolad who had come to the garden to eat some fruit. Unlike the other villagers they weren't scared of the gardener. The other villagers never dared to set foot in the

garden." (250 بهرنگی) They are the subalterns who are brave enough to try and voice their lost voice, wanting much more than what the Colonizer is willing to give them, willing to take back what is rightfully theirs.

At the beginning they steal fruit from the garden, but later on they plant the peach's seed and have a peach tree of their own, having something that is purely theirs. They are the ignored, marginal characters whom are writing back! They are willing to do anything in their power to get what they want, a voice of their own.

The boys do everything in their power to help the peach tree grow and give fruit so they would no longer need to steal from the Lord's garden. Thus, they go to the Snake valley and catch a snake, feeding it to the tree so that it can become bigger and stronger. The boys are the subalterns who want to be seen and heard, who no longer want to be under the Colonizer's power, and want to have their country's control back, that is why they plant their own tree.

The valley of the snakes can be taken as the illegal import trade. Snakes are dangerous to the boys, but good for their tree. They risk using the snakes for they believe in the path they have chosen, the path of fighting the dominating power and having a voice. The first time the boys use a snake, everything goes well and the tree becomes so big that it is able to bear fruit in its second year. But when for the second time they try to catch a fat snake Saheb Ali slips on a stone and is bitten by a snake. He dies that very night, living Poolad to follow the path alone.

Smuggling goods is a very risky act, one that has the potential of either profit or execution, depending on whether one gets caught or not. The boys entered this dangerous gamble not knowing how high the stakes might be, believing that they could handle whatever obstacles may be in their path. This naivety can been seen when they are talking about what

would they would do if the Gardener finds their tree, thinking they would simply set the Garden on fire and run; saying he is a nobody and can do nothing. What they do not see coming is being caught smuggling illegal good- catching snakes, and having to pay for it with their lives.

Poolad and Saheb-Ali are not just the subaltern, but the naïve idealistic sort believing that they can resist without having to pay a high price.

> Poolad: I say what if the damned gardener finds our tree!
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> Saheb-Ali: so what?
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> Poolad said nothing. Saheb-Ali said: he can't do shit. We are the ones who had planted the tree, the fruit is ours. Poolad was deep in thought. Then he said: but the land's not ours. Saheb-Ali said: again, he can't do shit. The land belongs to the one who plants in it. The land that we have planted a tree in is ours. Poolad got braver and said: course it's ours. If he does shit we'll set the whole garden on fire. Saheb-Ali hit his bare, sun burnt breast and said: It would be a cold day in hell if I let him off the hock that easily. We'll set fire and run. (بهرنگی 267-268)

When Saheb-Ali dies, Poolad can no longer go on living in the Village, for he sees Saheb-Ali in everything. That is why he chooses to leave the village for the city, leaving the Peach tree behind. "Poolad finished crying and said: I can't stay in the village anymore. Everywhere I go I see Saheb-Ali and become depressed. It's like he's always calling me. Poolad!… Poolad!... My dear Peach tree, I can't handle hearing this voice anymore." (بهرنگی 271) They did not know what they had gotten themselves in to and they were not strong enough to face the consequences; thus when one of them died, the other left their dreams, ideology, and the country behind. Poolad went to the city to become a shopkeeper's assistant, forgetting about

producing something purely his. At that time, many intellectuals left the country in search of a better place, somewhere that they could be free to express their ideas and voice their thoughts. Poolad can be taken as one of them.

The narrator, the peach that grows into a peach tree by the end of the story, is the new generation of the educated people. From the moment the seed was planted in the ground, it had the dream of giving fruit just to the villagers.

> I don't remember much about my winter dreams, all I remember is in one of my dreams I had become a big Peach tree, Poolad and Saheb-Ali climbed up me and shook my branches and all naked village kids had gathered around and were catching my peaches in air and eating them with delight, while the juice ran from their mouths and wet their breasts and bellies. A bald kid was constantly calling Poolad and asking: Poolad. You didn't tell me the name of these things we're eating. Because I want to tell my grandmother what I ate here, I ate a lot of them, but because they were so delicious I'm not yet full, and I'm willing to have some more, and I bet I will never have enough. (بهرنگی 259)

The tree did not want to be part of the colonized system of the time, thus after Saheb-Ali died and Poolad abandoned the village, the tree refused to give any peach to the gardener. No matter what the Gardener did, the tree refused to give fruit to the man who had sold his soul for money. "I have no idea how long has passed since then, but the gardener has not been successful in making me bear fruit, and he never will. I don't obey him, whether he threatens me, cuts me down or cuddle me." (بهرنگی 273) The tree was the child of the Subaltern generation and she wanted to voice what had been suppressed for generations. She refused to acknowledge the Gardener as the authority, saying he had sold his countrymen working for

those who kill his people. The tree knew perfectly well that by doing so she will be cut. She chose the path of no mere death, but suicide for this is the ultimate resistance.

The tree was planted in the Garden; it is considered part of the Lord's possessions, thus she no longer belongs to herself and by committing suicide, she is not killing herself but what belongs to the Lord and the Colonizer. The Peach tree knows perfectly well what she is about to do, and she is willing to pay the ultimate price for her belief. If death is the price she has to pay to find a voice and wake the ones who are deep asleep in their illusion, then so be it.

Conclusion

Ultimately, Behrangi's story does not indicate the final demise of the young peach tree. She is too valuable to be easily disposed of. The colonizer cannot bring itself to simply destroy it; it strives to make her its own. Thus, the story ends on a note of hope that the Peach tree might survive in the hopes of the arrival of another Poolad and Saheb-Ali. The ideology does not simply die, but its seed exists in all the subalterns that are waiting for the chance to be heard.

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